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ABSTRACT

A collection for children and teachers of traditional Cherokee recipes emphasizes the art, rather than the science, of cooking. The hand-printed, illustrated format is designed to communicate the feeling of Cherokee history and culture and to encourage readers to collect and add family recipes. The cookbook could be used as a starting point for recipe collecting projects, to encourage participation in class activities by older community members, and for further reading assignments from the 12-item bibliography of children's books. Traditional cooking and cooks are described, as are Cherokee fire myths and the Sacred Fire and Green Corn ceremonies. Legends of maize, squash, pumpkins, and hominy and information about growing and preparing the staple foods of the Cherokees are given. Many recipes include history or folklore about the ingredients or the products and encourage consultation with experienced cooks to augment description of cooking techniques. A 27-item glossary is provided. (LFL)

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Traditional Cherokee Food

Text and Illustrations by

Janey B. Hendrix

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Foreword and Teacher's Guide

Food is fundamental to the emotional as well as the physical well being of a family. Some foods can be called comfort foods, because they can impart a sense of nurturing and affection, such as a hearty soup or stew on a chilly evening; or cornbread like grandma makes. This brings a beloved person into focus in the mind and heart. Some foods are reward foods. A child is promised blue dumplings for supper if he gets his work all done, for instance. Some foods always suggest festivity. If kanuchi invariably is served on festive occasions then anytime kanuchi is served the occasion becomes special.

Unfortunately some foods can become punishment foods. If a child is forced to eat a certain food because it is good for him, or for any other reason, he will likely develop a life-long aversion to that food, and will get an emotional reaction whenever it is served, even though he may have forgotten the original reason for the aversion.

The choice of foods and the methods of food preparation are so rich in history and tradition they become an effective tie that helps to bind an individual or a family to the larger cultural and social unit.

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Cherokee families that move away from home to the urban areas can gain a feeling of security and maintain a vital link with their heritage when they prepare and eat their traditional dishes. When this is something that is shared with other Cherokee people living in the area it can impart a feeling of continuity and identity even though they are far from home.

Methods of food preparation change as conditions and lifestyles change. The availability of ingredients also changes-particularly for urban Cherokee cooks. This is something that seems to be as inevitable as the evolvement of the language. The basic flavor combinations and dishes remain the same just as the basic structure remains the same. It is the addition of elements needed to deal with day to day living that brings about change. It is those elements of the culture which remain basic and unchanged that can help to assure a child of his own individual place as an integral part of a greater whole.

The "friendly format" of this book is designed To encourage participation. When pages are added by the children, which include family recipes, and even folklore, they will look as if they belong because of the handmade look of the printed pages.

The illustrations are designed to draw the child into the scene so that the feeling of the history and culture of his own people is communicated to each one.

It is the art of cooking and food preparation, rather than the science, that is being advocated here.

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Suggested Activities

Older members of the community who are knowledgeable about traditional food preparation should be encouraged to participate in the projects on these pages, perhaps by talking with the class, perhaps by helping with actual cooking assignments, when this is practical.

Gathering recipes, methods, and family lore to add to these pages is probably the most important and fulfilling project the children could undertake. It should be impressed on them that they are actually doing something that has historical significance. These pages can easily become a book that will be treasured in adult life as much for its record of family history as for its practical instructions in traditional cooking and personal collection of Cherokee recipes.

Further reading assignments from the bibliography or other available material is possible for those students who show an interest in this kind of research.

The glossary can be utilized for word definition and spelling quizzes if this kind of activity is indicated.

Where it is possible without undue inconvenience, the actual preparation of recipes, either as a demonstration or with class participation would be valuable.

A cultural dinner, sponsored by the school or the class would be an ideal project if it is practical.

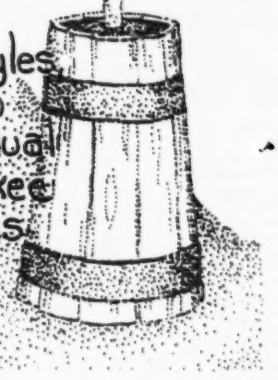
In the proper seasons field trips to gather wild onions, hickory nuts, or berries would be a good activity. The possibilities are numerous and the teacher's guide is flexible so that local projects can be incorporated into it.

What Is a Traditional Cook?

Traditional cooks are generally thought of as women who learned the art from their mothers and grandmothers, but many boys and men also learned how to cook in order to subsist when they were away from home, perhaps on a hunting trip. A good trail cook was always in demand for any journey.

Having been trained from childhood, good traditional cooks become instinctive with their art. They just <u>know</u> the right thing to add to a dish, or what can be substituted if some ingredient is not available.

In this book we are primarily concerned with the Traditional Cherokee cook, but it is important to remember that all cooking traditions are altered by such things as what foods are available. Since their basic purpose is to serve tasty, nutritious food, good cooks are seldom reluctant to take whatever pleases them from any other tradition they come in contact with. Indian cooks are no different. The exchange of recipes with other races and cultures continues today.



Prepackaged foods, changing lifestyles and a trend toward moving away from the countryside, all contribute to the gradual disappearance of the Time-honored Cherokee methods of preparing natural and wild foods. The collection and preservation of old family recipes while they are still available is a very worthwhile project.

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The Sacred Fire

Unlike some of the other Southeastern Tribes the Cherokees always believed the spirit of the fire to be feminine. Both the fire and the sun were represented by an old woman. They held the old woman in great esteem and fed her a little bit of whatever they were eating.

To treat the Old Woman of the Fire with disrespect by putting something unclean into the fire or failing to give her a portion of your food, could make her angry and she might turn into a whippoorwill or an owl and bring you bad luck. Hunters were always careful to give a small piece of meat from the kill to the fire to insure their future success.

At the beginning of the annual Green Corn Ceremony all the fires in the village were put out. At the end of the ceremony the priests would start a new Sacred Fire with a fire drill. Every household would have a new fire started from this central fire.

The Sacred Fire was brought to Oklahoma along the Trail of Tears.

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The favorite method for preparing most foods in the pre-contact days was by boiling. The most primitive method was stone-boiling which was done by heating stones very hot and dropping them into a container of water or other liquid.

With the stone-boiling method the container does not necessarily have to be fireproof. Tightly woven baskets were generally used.

Perhaps bits of ashes clinging to hot stones dropped into containers of boiling corn led to the discovery of the process for making hominy. This probably also accounts for the practice by some traditional cooks, of adding a bit of wood ashes to some recipies for flavor.

Direct boiling, that is putting a fireproof pot of water or other liquid directly over the fire, is a much easier and more efficient method of cooking.

The development of agriculture brought about a different lifestyle, in that the people began to stay longer in one place. This led to the development of pottery, which was not possible as long as the lifestyle was nomadic. Pottery, being both heavy and breakable, is difficult to travel with.

Even after pottery was in general use there were times when stone-boiling was still used. Probably some cooks thought it improved the flavor. Also, hunters could use the method to cook food inside the hide of a slain animal when they were away from home overnight.

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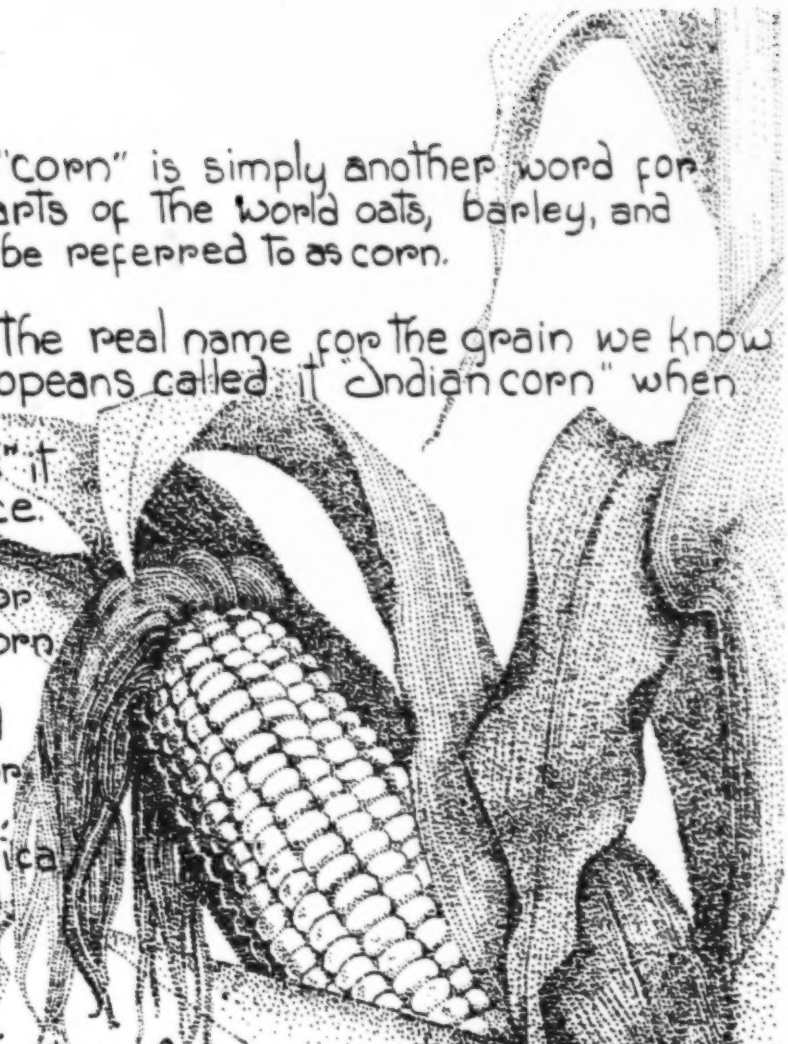
Maize

The word "corn" is simply another word for grain. In some parts of the world oats, barley, and even wheat may be referred to as corn.

Maize is the real name for the grain we know as corn. The Europeans called it "Indian corn" when they came to this continent, and "corn" it has been ever since.



The ancestor plants of today's corn has been feeding people in South and Central America for thousands of years, and in North America for at least several hundred.

Agriculture is at least as ancient in America as it is in Europe. It began in both places about 9000 years ago. At that time there were tribes of people in South and Central America who were living in caves. These people learned to plant some of the seeds they gathered. This way they could have plants growing where it was convenient to gather them.

Eventually the people learned that if they saved the biggest and best seeds to replant they would get bigger and better plants. One of the wild seeds that they planted was the ancestor of maize. This was one of those events that goes unrecorded in history, but turns out to be vital to the development of a civilization.

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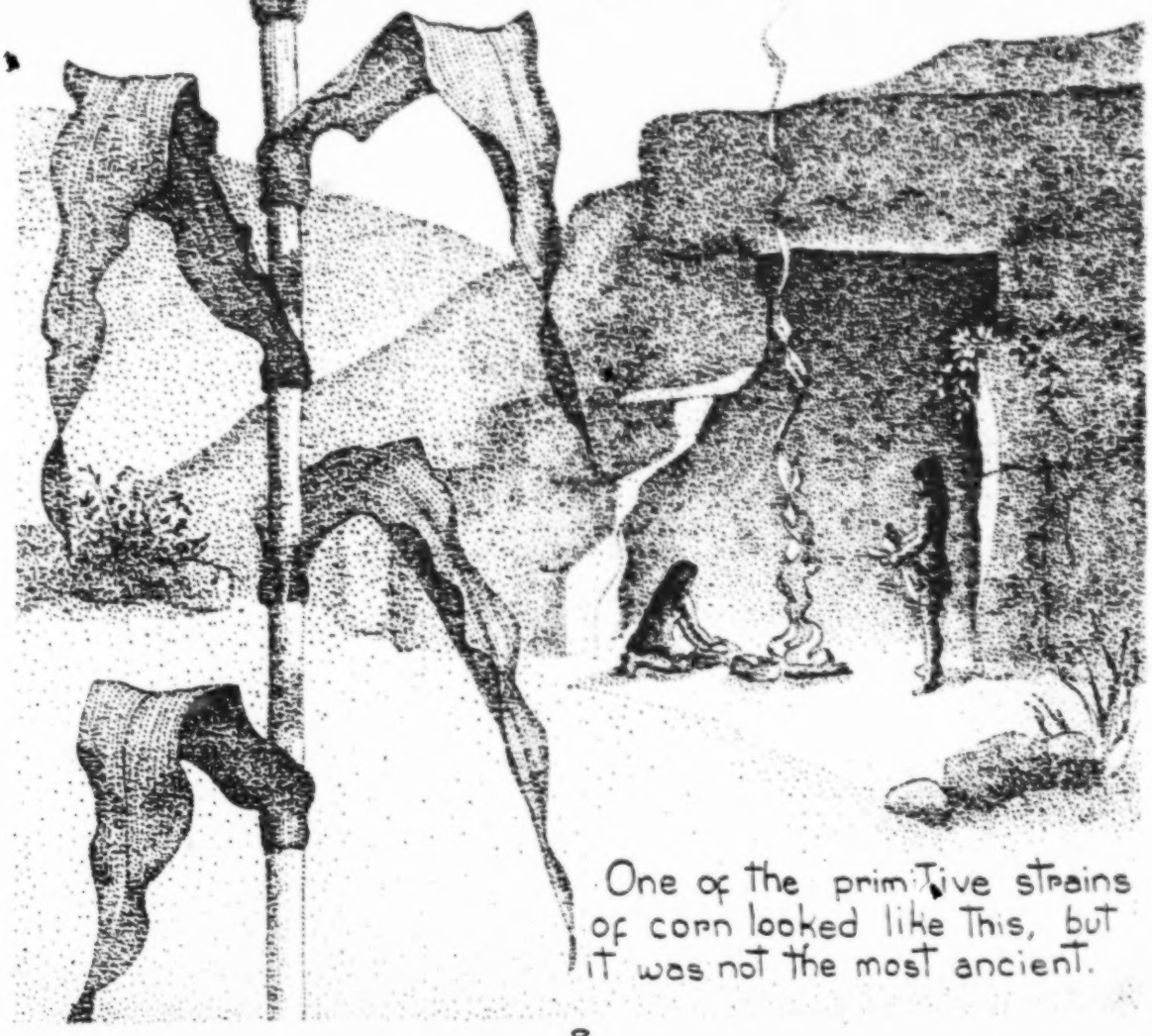
Primitive corn has been found in some cave dwellings in Central America that scientists have determined to be over 5000 years old.

Squash, beans, and gourds are believed to have been cultivated even earlier.

Some authorities believe they have found evidence that some innovators among the very early people on the American continents experimented with planting as much as 9000 years ago.



One of the primitive strains of corn looked like this, but it was not the most ancient.

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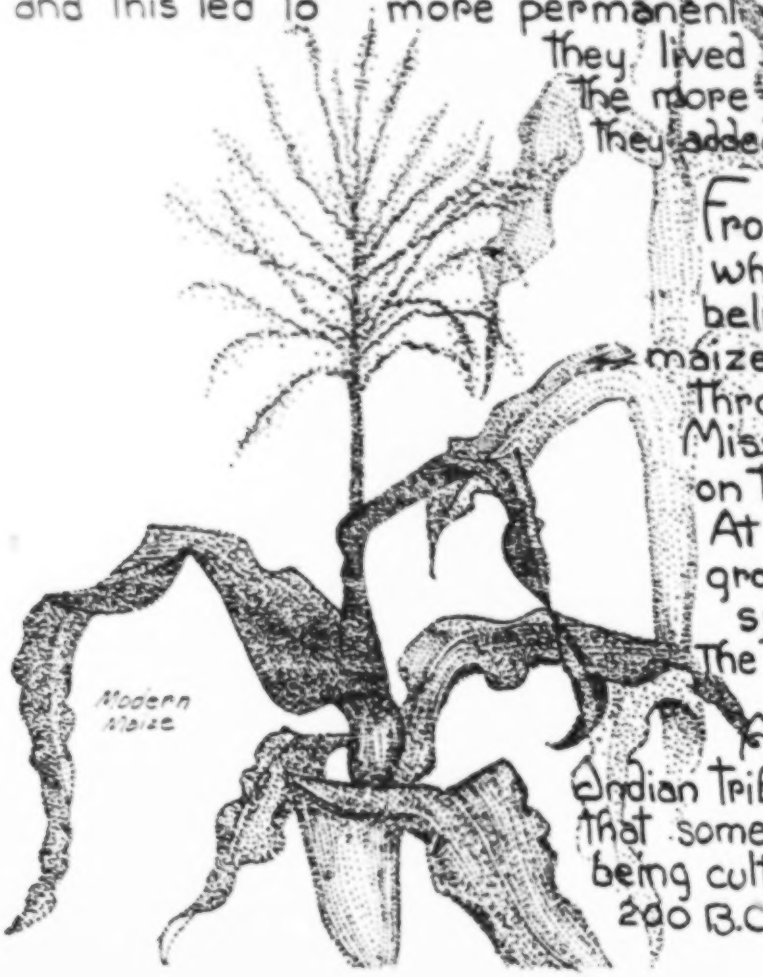
This ancient plant looked nothing at all like the maize that developed through hundreds of years of planting, and bore no resemblance to what is called corn today. It was a grass that had a few seeds that looked something like small kernals of corn, but there was no cob.

As the centuries passed, all of this hand planting and care of the ancestral maize plant caused it to lose its power to reproduce itself in the wild state. In the process of improvement the plant began to develop a small cob with several seeds on it.

The development of the maize plant changed the of the people because they began to stay in the same place longer and longer in order to tend their fields, and this led to more permanent dwellings. The longer they lived in the same place the more rooms and furnishings they added to their homes.



From Central America where many scientists believe the cultivation of maize began, it moved up through Mexico to the Mississippi Valley and on to the Great Lakes. At the same time the growing of maize was spreading southward to the Pampas of Argentina.

Among Southeastern Indian tribes there is evidence that some small gardens were being cultivated as early as 200 B.C.

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Selu
The Corn Woman

The spirit of the corn is depicted as a woman in most of the Indian Tribes. The Cherokees call this spirit Selu, The Corn Woman.

The best known story about the origin of corn tells of Selu going to the storehouse every day and returning with a basket of corn for her family. This was before the growing of corn was known to the people so it was all very mysterious.

Selu's Two young sons wondered about this, so one day They followed her when she went to the storehouse. They climbed up on the outside and peeked through a chink in the logs and saw their mother shake herself and the corn fell from her body into the basket.

Later the boys Talked about this and they decided that their mother was a witch. This meant they would have to kill her because witches were always put to death.

Selu read the thoughts of her sons and said to them: "After you have killed me, clear a large piece of ground in front of the house and drag my body seven times around the circle."

The boys cleared only seven little spots in front of the house and after Selu was

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dead they dragged her body around the circle only twice. Wherever her blood fell to the ground corn sprang up.

Because the boys failed to do exactly as they were told, corn does not grow all over the earth and it must be planted by hand and worked faithfully in order for it to grow.

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Selu and the Hunter

Another favorite story about Selu has to do with a hunter who had been out hunting for several days with no success.

Every night, after a long day of traveling long weary miles through the woods and valleys in search of game, he would lie down to sleep beside his little campfire, and each night he would dream that he could hear beautiful singing.

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Early one morning, before daylight, the hunter woke up and could still hear the singing. He walked in the direction of the sound and it led him to a single stalk of corn.

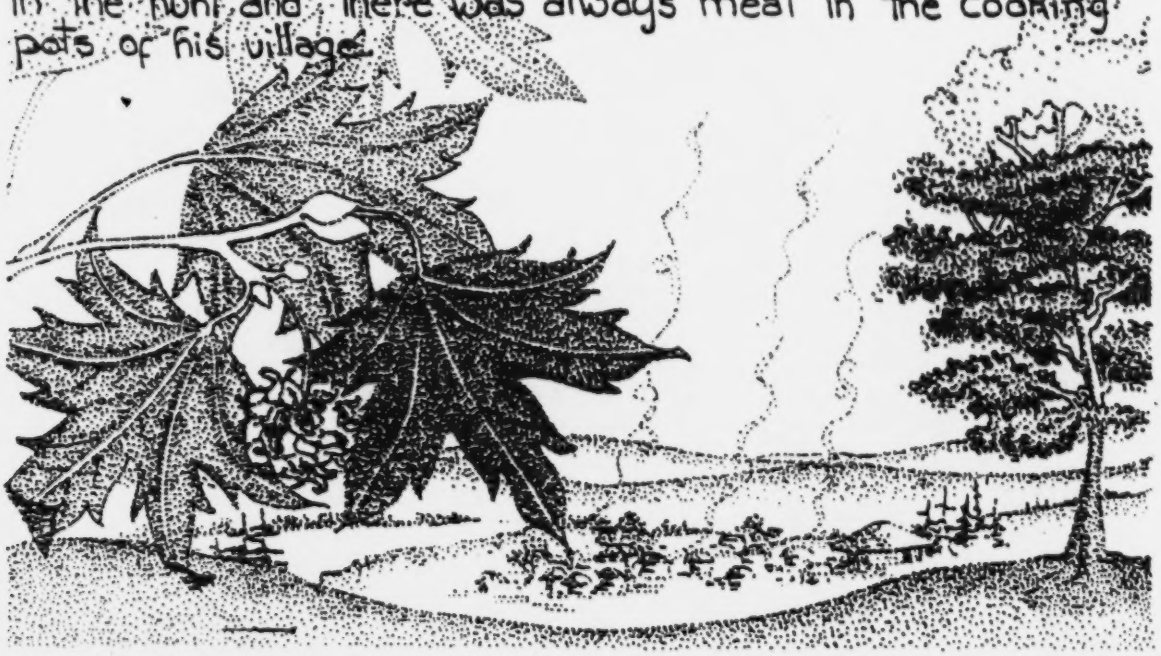
To his amazement the corn plant began to speak to him and to tell him secrets of the hunt that would make him always be successful.

The corn plant told him he should always be generous with the game he took and to use it to feed people who were hungry.

When it was midday and the sun was high in the sky, the corn plant took the form of a beautiful woman and then rose gracefully up into the air and disappeared.

When this happened the hunter realized that he had been talking to Setu, the Spirit of the Corn.

After that day the hunter was always successful in the hunt and there was always meat in the cooking pots of his village.



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Squash and pumpkins were among the very earliest vegetables cultivated. Beans were introduced about 800 AD, and these three vegetables became the main staples in the diet of the Southeastern Indian.

Corn and beans are very complementary. Corn uses up the nitrogen in the soil and beans put it back again. These two vegetables also complement each other in the diet. When eaten together, corn and beans make a rather well balanced meal.

At the time of the first contact with the Europeans the cultivation of maize was a well developed enterprise among the Southeastern Tribes. The early corn, which was eaten as roasting ears, was planted in small gardens in or near the villages. The late corn, from which hominy was made, was planted in the river bottoms. Everyone in the village helped with the big fields.

The maize was stored either in storehouses or cribs which were built high off the ground and reached by means of a ladder, or else in a special store room inside the dwelling itself.

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The Green Corn Ceremony

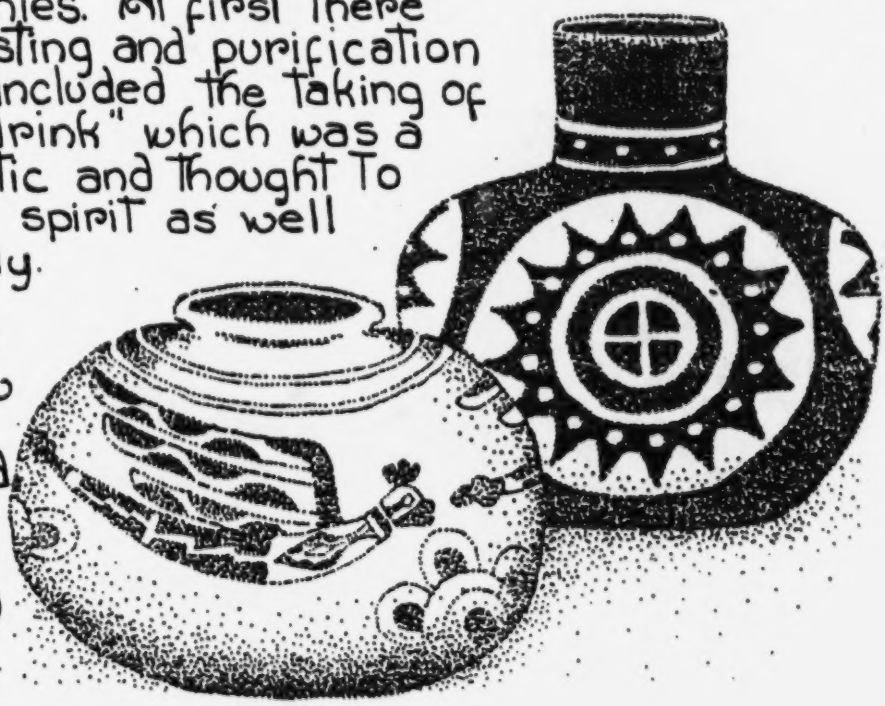
Among all the Tribes That Traditionally depended upon maize for their main source of food, there was some kind of important harvest ceremony. The people felt the need to offer thanks and to purify themselves for the coming year.

For The Cherokees and the other original Southeastern Tribes The Green Corn Dance, which took place when the corn was ripe and ready to eat, was a new year celebration.

The preparations went on for weeks. New pottery and baskets were made, as well as new clothes. When the four day celebration began, the old things were destroyed and all the new things brought out.

The people came together in the central squares of the larger towns for the dances and ceremonies. At first there would be fasting and purification rites which included the taking of the "black drink" which was a strong emetic and thought To cleanse the spirit as well as the body.

After that the new corn would be prepared and the feasting and rejoicing would begin.



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The Staff of Life for the Southeastern Indians was hominy, which is corn that has been processed with lye.

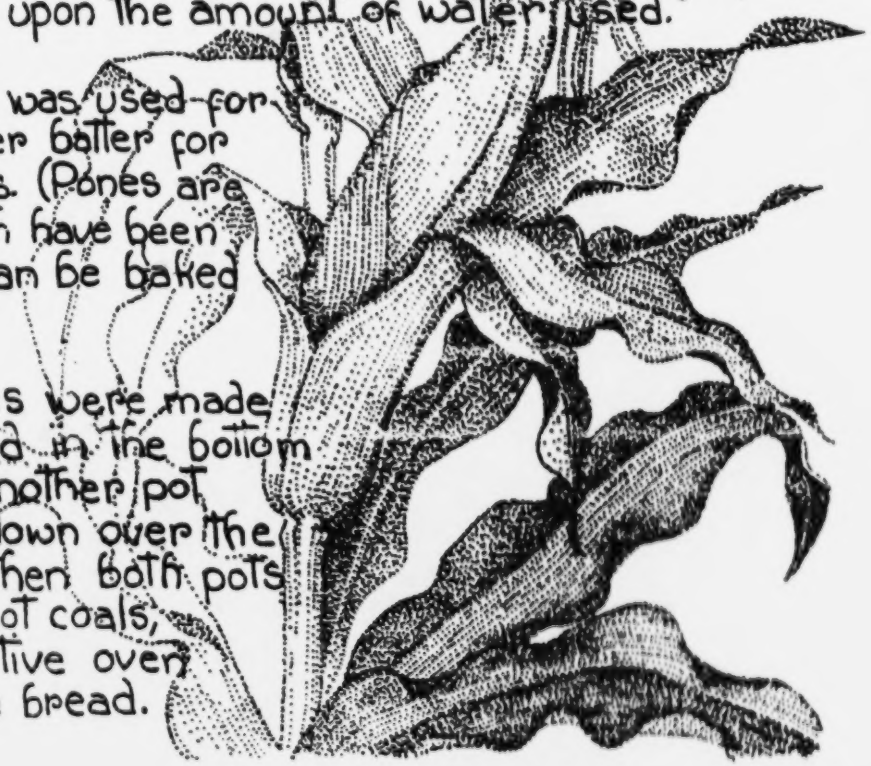
This process increases the amount of niacin and some of the amino acids in the corn. For people who have a diet based on maize, the making of hominy prevents pellagra, a serious condition caused by a deficient diet.

The method for making hominy varies, but the processing of mature corn with wood ashes is the one still preferred by traditional Indian cooks who say wood ashes make soft hominy and commercial lye makes the kernals tough and hard.

Before the Removal the Cherokees and other Southeastern Indians made bread of fine hominy meal and boiling water to make a batter, the consistency of the batter depending upon the amount of water used.

Thin batter was used for fritters and thicker batter for loaves and pones. (Pones are small loaves which have been flattened out and can be baked on a griddle.)

When loaves were made they were placed in the bottom of a clay pot, another pot turned upside down over the first one and then both pots covered with hot coals, making an effective oven for baking the bread.



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Hominy (Traditional Method)

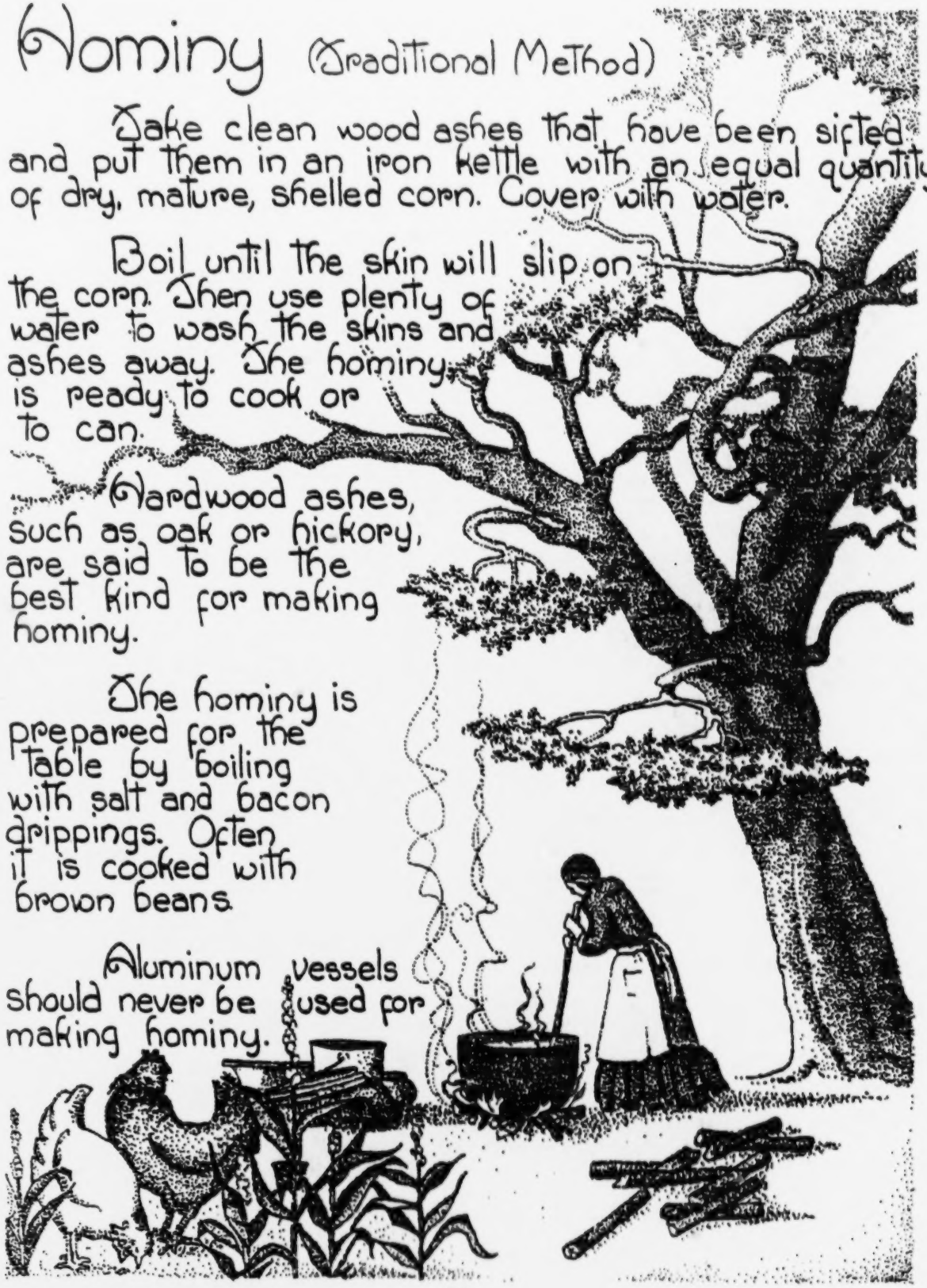
Take clean wood ashes that have been sifted and put them in an iron kettle with an equal quantity of dry, mature, shelled corn. Cover with water.

Boil until the skin will slip on the corn. Then use plenty of water to wash the skins and ashes away. The hominy is ready to cook or to can.

Hardwood ashes, such as oak or hickory, are said to be the best kind for making hominy.

The hominy is prepared for the table by boiling with salt and bacon drippings. Often it is cooked with brown beans.

Aluminum vessels should never be used for making hominy.



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Hominy #2

This method of making hominy is almost the same as the first one, but differs slightly. This lady makes a smaller amount and makes it more often. The mature dry corn can be stored in a cool dry place until it is needed for hominy. Only mature dry corn can be used for hominy.

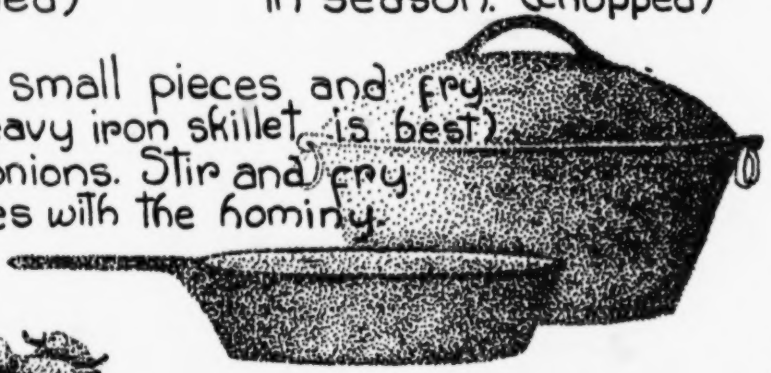
"For one half gallon of dry corn use about one quart of ashes from green hardwood. Boil the corn and ashes together with just enough water to cover them. When they start to boil stir until the mixture gets thick. A little more water can be put in if it gets too thick and dry.

When the skin begins to come off the corn take it off the stove and wash it in lots of cold water until it is clean. Rub the hominy between your hands to help remove the skins. That's all there is to it."

Fried Hominy

2 strips bacon
2 cups hominy (cooked or canned)
2 or 3 green onions or several wild onions in season. (chopped)

Cut the bacon in small pieces and fry until crisp. (A heavy iron skillet is best) Stir in chopped onions. Stir and fry five or ten minutes with the hominy.



Season with black or red pepper if desired.

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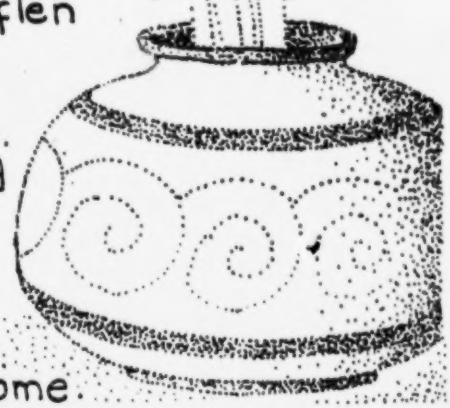
The Corn Drink

There are many variations to the corn drink, which was the basic beverage of the Southeastern tribes in both the historical and prehistorical periods. There is a legend that the corn drink was first poured down through a rent in the sky as a gift for the people.

Using mature dry corn, parch about a cup of grains in a heavy iron skillet over low heat, stirring constantly, until golden brown. The amount of parching will affect the flavor, so some experimenting needs to be done to see how dark you like your corn to be parched.

Put the parched corn in a mortar and pound it as you would Kanuchi. When the corn is pounded into very course meal cook it in water until it is done, about 30 minutes. Start with three cups of water and add more if it begins to thicken too much. This, too, is a matter of taste. Add a bit of salt.

Other ingredients were often added for flavor: Hickory nuts, beans, bone marrow, a tiny bit of wood ashes, some fresh pork. The addition of ingredients and the methods of preparation vary from tribe to tribe and from family to family, but the nourishing corn drink was always kept available in every home.



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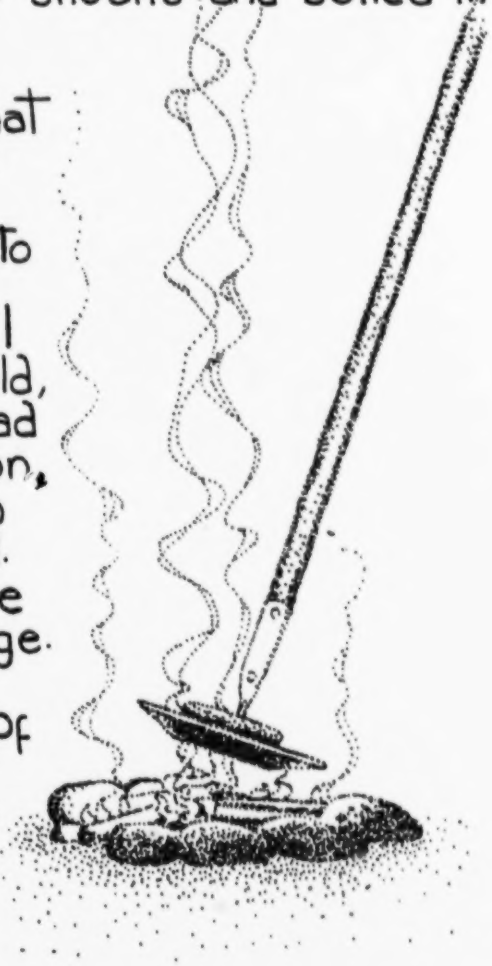
Corn Bread

The making of corn bread is a fine art in the South among all the races who have settled there, and each cook tends to think that his or her method is the "right" one. (Corn bread was developed by the Indians of Central America, in all probability.) Southern cooks like fine white cornmeal and never add sugar to the batter. Sugar can be added or omitted according to taste.

Corn bread can be baked in the oven or on top of the stove in a heavy cast iron pan. It can be fried like fritters or pancakes on a griddle or it can be wrapped in corn shucks and boiled in water.

There is a tradition that in the days before the Civil War the black field hands would take corn bread batter to the fields with them and at mid-day they would build small fires on the edge of the field, clean the large hoes they had been using for chopping cotton, and bake small corn cakes on the hoes for their noon meal. This is the way the term "hoe cake" passed into the language.



Many cooking methods of West Africa have been added by the black people to enrich the cooking traditions of the Indians as well as the Europeans in America.

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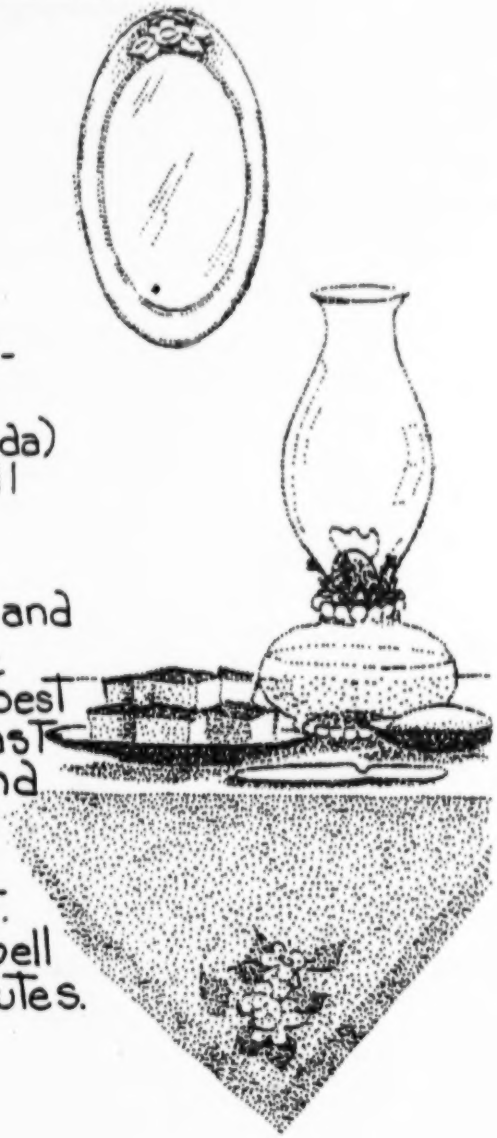
Corn Bread (continued)



Basic Corn Bread

1 cup meal
½ cup flour
2 Teaspoons baking powder
1 Tablespoon sugar (optional)
2 cups milk (If you use buttermilk or clabber milk add about ½ Teaspoon baking soda)
¼ cup melted shortening or oil
1 egg, beaten.

Mix the ingredients together and pour into a pan that has been greased and preheated. The best Traditional cooks always use cast iron or tin pans. The size and shape can vary, but about a nine inch round or eight inch square pan will be about right. Bake in a 450° oven until well browned, usually about 30 minutes.

Southern Corn Bread

The recipe is the same as the basic one except that 1½ cups of white cornmeal is used and the flour and sugar are omitted. Buttermilk or clabber milk are much preferred by Southern cooks.

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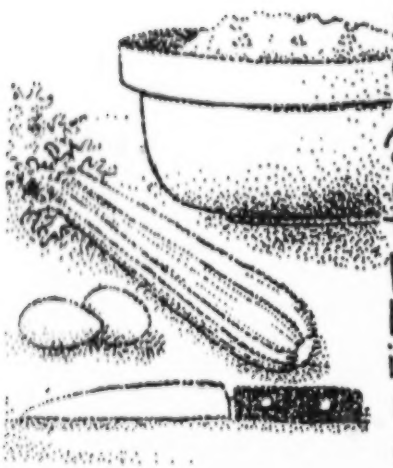
Corn Bread (continued)

Cornbread Dressing

Crumble into small pieces enough cornbread and biscuits to make about 6 cups of crumbs. Usually 4 cups of cornbread crumbs and 2 of biscuit is preferred, but it can vary.

Chop a large onion finely and add to the bread crumbs.
Sprinkle 2 Teaspoons of sage, 1 Teaspoon of salt, and half a Teaspoon of pepper over the crumbs and mix it all well. Go ahead and use your hands, the good cooks do. If you like chopped celery, now is the time to add it. About 1 cup will be sufficient.
Take about 2 cups of broth (chicken or turkey broth is usually used but dressing made with beef broth is very good, also). Be sure the broth is good and cool and stir two beaten eggs into it. The eggs may be omitted, but eggs give the dressing a lighter texture.



Pour the broth and egg mixture over the dressing. At this point you have to decide on how moist you want the mixture to be. As a general rule it should hold its shape. There is so much variation in the moisture content of the bread that the amount of broth must be varied. Put the dressing in a greased pan large enough so it will be 1½ to 2 inches thick when spread out in the bottom of the pan. Bake in a hot oven (375°) until browned on top.

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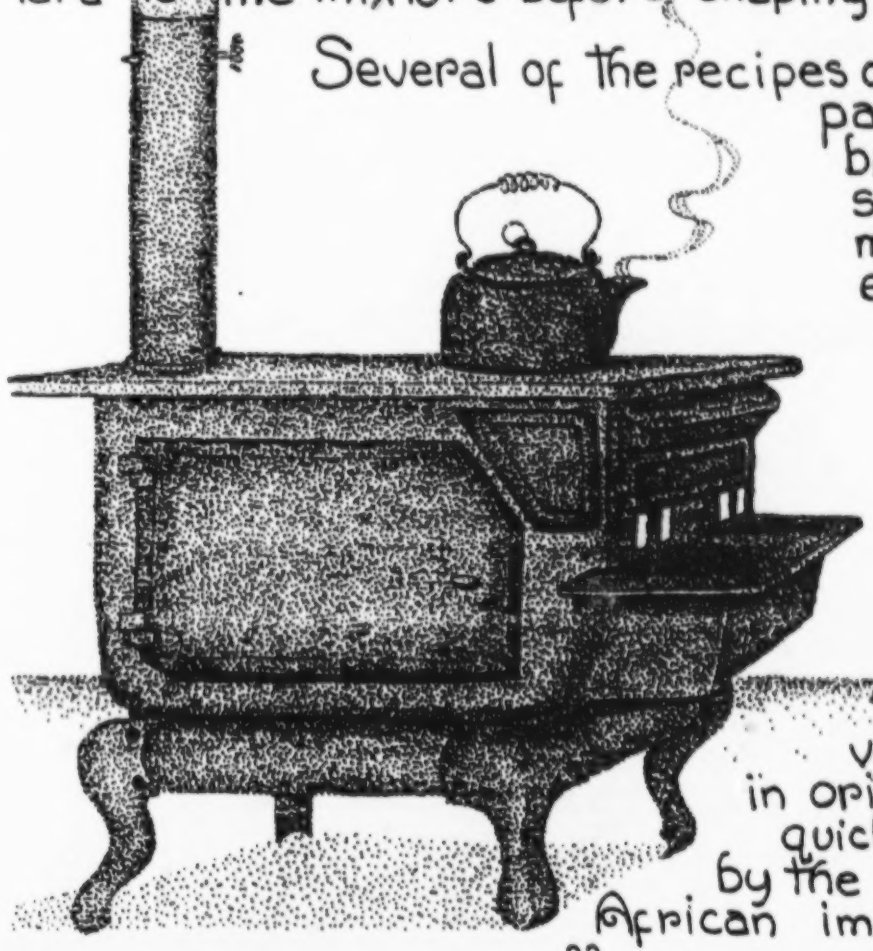
Corn Bread (continued)

Scalded Corn Bread

This is one of those deceptively simple recipes that takes practice to get just right.

Start with 2 cups of cornmeal (white meal is better for scalding). Add a teaspoon of salt and about a cup of boiling water. The mixture must be moist but hold its shape when made into pones or balls. More water can be added if needed.

If the bread is to be baked add a teaspoon of baking powder to the meal and 1/4 to 1/2 cup of lard to the mixture before shaping into pones.



Several of the recipes on the following pages are based upon the scalded meal method. In the early days the tribes of the Southeast liked to use scalded hominy meal for recipes such as these. They are very ancient in origin and were quickly adopted by the European and African immigrants.

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Bean Bread

4 cups meal, sifted with
1 Teaspoon salt,
1 Teaspoon soda, and
1½ Teaspoons baking powder.

Add all at once:
2 cups beans
2 cups (or more)
bean juice

Have the beans and bean juice at the boil and pour them over the meal mixture.

The amount of liquid will have to be adjusted until you have a soft dough that will hold its shape.

With your hands shape the dough into pones about three inches across and an inch thick. Place in a greased pan and bake in a 375° oven until lightly browned on top.

Bean Bread #2

2 cups cooked beans
1½ cups bean juice (cooled)
2 eggs, beaten
2 cups cornmeal
1 Teaspoon salt
1 Teaspoon baking powder

Be sure to have the beans well seasoned with bacon drippings.

Mix all the ingredients together and bake in a 450° oven until brown.

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Corn Shuck Bread

(Before the recipe is started the corn shucks must be prepared. Take the shucks from several ears of mature dry corn and wash them thoroughly. Then put them in a container and pour boiling water over them. Let the shucks soak in the water to become pliable.)

Pour 2 cups of boiling water over 3 cups of cornmeal to which a level teaspoon of soda has been added. Some cooks add salt to this recipe and others say the bread holds its shape better without salt. The batter must be firm enough to hold together. Shape into oblong pones that measure about two by three inches and are one inch thick.

Wrap the pones in several layers of corn shucks and tie them with the strips. Drop the wrapped pones into a large pot of rapidly boiling water. It takes from 20 to 30 minutes for the bread to cook.

No one knows how old this recipe is, but it was probably first prepared with the ancient stone-boiling method.

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Crackling Corn Bread

(Cracklings are the crunchy bits left after all the lard has been rendered from pork fat. They can be made by cutting into very small pieces the fat from a pork roast or fresh pork chops and frying them very slowly until all the fat is out of them and they are brown and crunchy. Do not allow the grease to become hot enough to smoke.)

1½ cups corn meal.
2 Teaspoons baking powder
2 cups buttermilk
½ Teaspoon soda
1 egg, beaten
1 cup cracklings

Mix together and bake in a hot oven (about 400°) until the cornbread is brown on top.

Corn Pones

1 cup corn meal
½ Teaspoon salt
1 Teaspoon baking powder
2 Tablespoons bacon drippings
½ cup milk

If you use buttermilk or sour milk be sure to add a pinch of soda.

Mix the ingredients all together and shape into pones. These should be about three inches in diameter and ¾ inches thick. Bake on top of the stove in a heavy iron skillet with a lid. Turn once to brown on top. If the iron skillet is old and well seasoned you will not have to grease it. Otherwise put in a little bit of bacon drippings to prevent sticking.

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Hard Bread, which was made for long journeys, started with the basic batter but was molded into donut shapes and baked slowly until it was very hard. After it was done the bread was spread out in the sun until it was dry and hard as stones.

The donut shapes were then strung on a thong or cord like large beads and could be easily carried when traveling. When camp was made in the evening some of the bread was stewed in water to make it edible.

Nuts, seeds, or berries were often added to the batter to add flavor and nutritional value.

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Kanuchi

Hickory nuts were an important food source to the Southeastern Tribes and Kanuchi is considered to be a real delicacy to the Cherokees in Oklahoma Today.

She nuts are gathered in the fall and allowed to dry for a few weeks before the Kanuchi making begins. It is a simple process, but that does not necessarily mean that it is easy. Kanuchi making Takes some effort.

She hickory nuts are cracked and the largest pieces of shell removed either by shaking the pieces Through a loosely woven basket, or picking them out by hand.

A heavy log with one end hollowed out to a depth of several inches is placed on end and a quantity of the nuts, which still contain some shells, is put into the cavity and pounded with a long heavy stick with the end rounded to have the same contour, more or less, as the cavity in the log.

She nuts are pounded until they are of a consistency that can be formed into a ball that will hold its shape. Kanuchi balls are usually about Three inches in diameter and must be stored in a cold place. Today Kanuchi is usually preserved by freezing.

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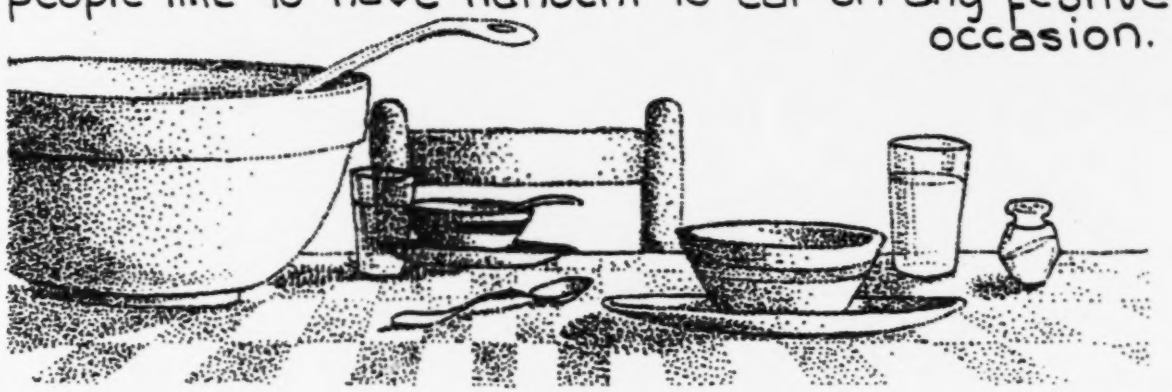
Kanuchi (continued)

To prepare kanuchi for the table, place a kanuchi ball in a saucepan with about a quart of water and bring it to a boil to dissolve the ball. Allow the kanuchi to simmer about ten minutes and then pour it through a fine sieve. (A colander lined with cheese cloth works very well for this.) All the shells are left in the sieve. If you have the time and patience you can pick the larger bits of nut meat from the shells in the sieve and add them to the liquid kanuchi.

The kanuchi should be about as thick as light cream. Most traditional cooks will add about two cups of homemade hominy to a quart of kanuchi. Some cooks prefer hominy grits which are prepared according to package directions and added to the kanuchi.

Such things as consistency and how much hominy or hominy grits to add are, of course a matter of taste, as is the addition of salt. Most people like a bit of salt, and a few even add some sugar or honey.

Serve kanuchi hot as a soup. The Cherokee people like to have kanuchi to eat on any festive occasion.



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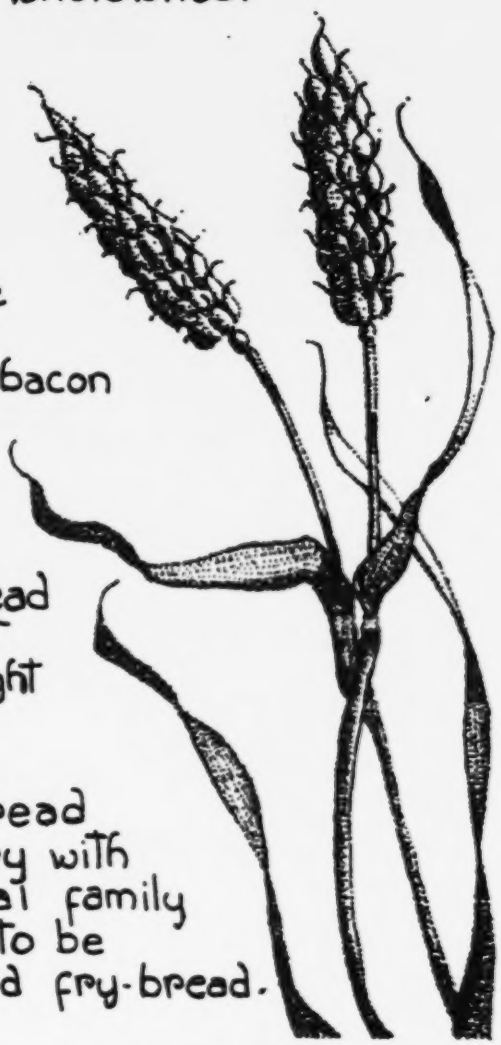
Wheat was first introduced to the Tribes of the Southwest by the Spaniards. Early in the 1600's the French brought wheat to the northeast coast but it was to be almost another hundred years before wheat flour came into general use in the Mississippi Valley. It was obtained by trade, for the most part.

The Cherokees adapted wheat flour to their own way of doing things and fry-bread became a staple in their diet. Made with refined flour, as it is Today, fry-bread does not have the nutritive value of corn bread or bread made of wholewheat flour, but it has become a tradition with the Cherokee cook, as well as Those of many other tribes.



Most Traditional cooks will Tell you that pure lard is the best medium for frying bread. Some like To add a cup or so of bacon drippings to the lard for flavor. Today more and more cooks are using oil for most of their frying. Since it is not unknown for fry-bread to be cooked in bear grease it can be considered to be all right to experiment.

The recipes for fry-bread are very simple and they vary with the region and with the individual family Tradition. It takes practice to be able to make consistently-good fry-bread.

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Fry Bread #1

To one cup of flour add Two Teaspoons baking powder and one half teaspoon salt. Mix in about three-fourths of a cup of milk. Then add enough more flour To make a stiff dough. It is in judging the stiffness of the dough that experience counts and, if possible, someone who knows about fry-bread should be consulted.

Place the dough on a floured board and roll out to a thickness of about one half inch. Cut into Two by Three inch rectangles or any desired shape. Drop, one at a time, into fat that is very hot but not smoking. Brown on each side and serve hot.

Fry Bread #2

2 cups sour milk or buttermilk.
1 Tablespoon shortening
1 Teaspoon salt
2 to 3 cups flour
½ Teaspoon soda
3 heaping Teaspoons baking powder

Mix the baking powder, soda, and salt with 2 cups of flour. Add the shortening and mix well. Add enough flour to make a stiff dough. Roll out on a floured board until the dough is ½ inch thick. Cut into 2 or 3 inch squares and make Two or three one inch slits in each piece. Fry in deep fat.

Filled Fry Bread

Roll fry-bread dough extra thin and cut into rectangles of about 4 by 6 inches. Put a small amount of chopped and seasoned cooked meat or chicken on each piece. Fold over and pinch the edges. Fry in deep fat.

Wild Grapes

Blue Dumplings
(Grape Dumplings)

For the dumplings mix together a cup of water with a cup of flour To which has been added one teaspoon baking powder. To this add Two Tablespoons melted shortening You must have a stiff dough which you can roll out to about a one fourth inch thickness, so your water and flour must be adjusted until you have a dough of this consistency. This takes practice. Cut the dough into one by Two inch strips or squares or whatever shape you like.

Stem and wash your grapes. Put them in a saucepan with enough water to barely cover. Cook the grapes over medium heat until they are very soft and then mash them with a potato masher. Put a layer of cheese-cloth over a colander or use a fine sieve and strain the juice. Add sugar to taste and bring the juice to a boil in a large pan. You will need about two quarts of juice for dumplings.

Drop the dumplings, one at a time, into the boiling juice. Cook for about five minutes then reduce heat and simmer about ten minutes or more until done.

Other wild berries can be used.

Wild Black-berries

Caution: Remember that all varieties of wild grapes have several small seeds in each grape. If you find what looks like grapes but with only one large seed in each one, it may be the poisonous moonseed.

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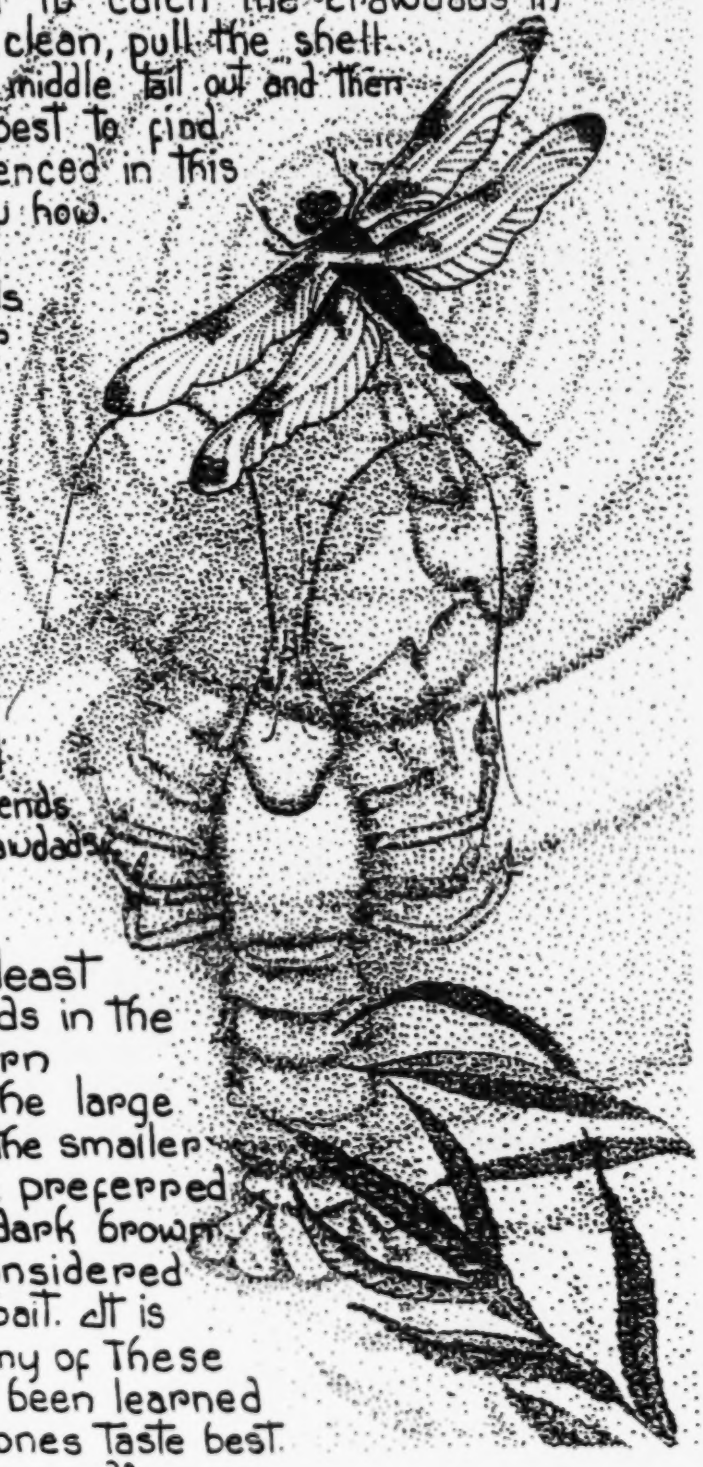
Fried Crawdads

It is important to catch the crawdads in clean clear water. To clean, pull the shell off the head and pull the middle tail out and then pull the legs off. It is best to find someone who is experienced in this procedure to show you how.

Drop the crawdads briefly into boiling water then drain them well.

Roll them in meal that has been seasoned with salt and pepper. Drop them into hot deep fat or pan fry, turning constantly. Cook for about ten to fifteen minutes or until done. Cooking time depends upon the size of the crawdads.



There are at least four kinds of crawdads in the creeks of Northeastern Oklahoma; of these the large bluish-green ones and the smaller yellow-brown ones are preferred for eating. The small dark brown and black ones are considered to be fit only for fishbait. It is safe, of course, to eat any of these crustaceans, but it has been learned by experience which ones taste best.

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Dried Food

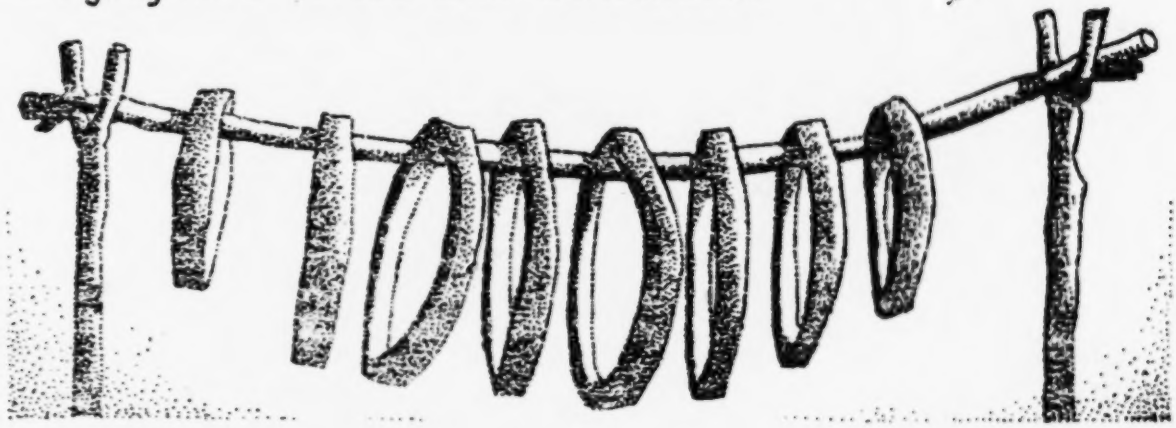
In the not-too-distant past about the only way the people had to preserve food for the winter was drying. This is still a very good method.

Pumpkins were one of the first vegetables to be cultivated by the Cherokees. This method of drying was collected directly from a Tribal elder and it is the old way.

Dried Pumpkin

"Cut ripe pumpkin in rings and remove the peeling. Hang on a clean stick to dry in the sun or near a fire. Store in the attic until you are ready to use it. Wash real good and cook any way you like pumpkin, I like mine cooked down real low and fried."

Although it is not mentioned in the recipe, some consideration must be given to the thickness of the rings. The thinner they are the easier they will dry, but they will have to be thick enough to bear their own weight, so the size of the pumpkin will be a factor. In this case judgment and experience play a part. From one to two inches thick is probably the best to start with. Drying time varies with conditions.



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Dried Corn

Drying is a very good way to preserve corn, as well as other vegetables and fruit. The dried corn is light in weight and easily stored and moved.

When the corn has matured to the roasting ear stage it is ready for drying.

The corn, with shucks still on, is put into a large pot of boiling water for ten to fifteen minutes, then drained and cooled.

The next step is to pull the shucks back from the ear but leaving them still attached. Tie a string around the shucks and hang the ears up to dry. The drying process can take two weeks or more, depending upon the weather.

Shell the dried corn and store it in muslin bags in a place that is dry and well ventilated.

Dried corn is prepared by boiling the same way that beans are, covered with water and seasoned with salt, pepper, and butter or meat.

Beef and dried corn is still a very popular dish. Brown cubed beef in the oven and then add it to the dried corn as it simmers. Allow two hours or more for cooking.

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More Dried Food

Leather Britches

Prepare Tender young green beans by stringing, if necessary, and snapping or cutting off the ends. With a large needle and heavy thread or twine pull the thread through an end of each green bean. Do not put too many on the same string or it will break. Hang the strings up in a sunny place to dry. It Takes about two months. Store in a cloth bag in a dry place.

To cook, wash the beans thoroughly and then soak for an hour or two in water. Add a bit of salt-pork and some black pepper, bring to a boil. Then reduce the heat and simmer very slowly for about three hours.

Dried Winter Squash

Take off the peeling with a sharp knife. Cut the squash in half and scrape out all the seeds and pulp. Let the squash dry in the sun for a day so they will be leathery, then they can be cut spirally in long strips. Hang the strips on a line in the sun until they are dry.

Dried Fruit

Apples can be peeled, cored, sliced into rings and hung on a line in The sun. Cover with cheesecloth.

Peaches, apricots and plums are halved or quartered and put on a screen in The sun. Another screen over them will keep insects away. Dried fruit has a flavor of its own and makes good sauce or fruit pies.

Still More Dried Food

Dried Cabbage

Cabbage can be dried by taking the large outer leaves and hanging them in the sun from a stick or line until they are dry. Store in cloth bags in a dry place. To cook, pour hot water over the leaves and soak them for one hour and then season with salt and bacon drippings and simmer until Tender.

Dried Fish

The old way is to dig a hole or pit about one and a half or two feet deep and build a fire in it with about as much hard wood as it will hold. (Do not use pine or cedar as this will affect the flavor of the fish.) Let the fire burn down to glowing embers. Lay some sticks or a wooden rack across the pit and put cleaned fish on top. If it is a large fish it should be split in two as you would for frying. Turn the fish several times while it is cooking.

When the fish is thoroughly done remove it from the fire, bone it, and lay it in the sun to dry. You will have to choose carefully the place you put the fish for this process, since it would be an obvious temptation for the family cat. Protect it from insects, too. A kind of box made of stainless steel screenwire would be ideal. Store in a dry place. To prepare for eating just heat with some moisture.

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Dried Beef or Game (Jerky)

Special care must be Taken with meat so there will be no spoilage, as This can lead to very dangerous food poisoning. The most important thing is not to let the drying process get interrupted.

Simple Jerky

Cut very lean, trimmed, meat into 3 or 4 inch cubes. With a very sharp knife cut the meat into a long 1/4 inch thick strip, cutting with the grain. (Putting the cubes into the freezer until they are very firm will help with this process.)

Hold the ends of the strips tightly and stretch or jerk them. Thread a string through one end of each piece and hang it from a rack in the hot sun. A fire built nearby will add a smoke flavor, protect from insects and hasten drying.

The meat must be brought inside at night to protect it from dampness unless the fire is kept going constantly.

Drying Time depends upon a number of variables, but with both sun and fire, probably Two or Three days will do.

The cube of meat may be soaked in salt water or other marinade for several hours before drying begins.

Pork must never be dried in this manner.

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Wild Greens

Of all the wild greens, the most popular among the Oklahoma Cherokees is poke and cochanna.

Only the young shoots of poke can be eaten, the roots, berries, and mature plant contain poison.

Poke should be par-boiled, that is boiled for a few minutes and the water drained off and discarded. Then the poke is put into fresh water, salt and bacon drippings added, and cooked until tender.

Cochanna does not have to be par-boiled, but can be cooked in the original water until it is done.

POKE

COCHANNA

Both poke and cochanna are gathered in the spring. If the young shoots are cut regularly the greens can be gathered several times from the same spot.

Wild greens are rich in vitamins and minerals. The roots grow deep and bring the nutrients up from the soil to the leaves.

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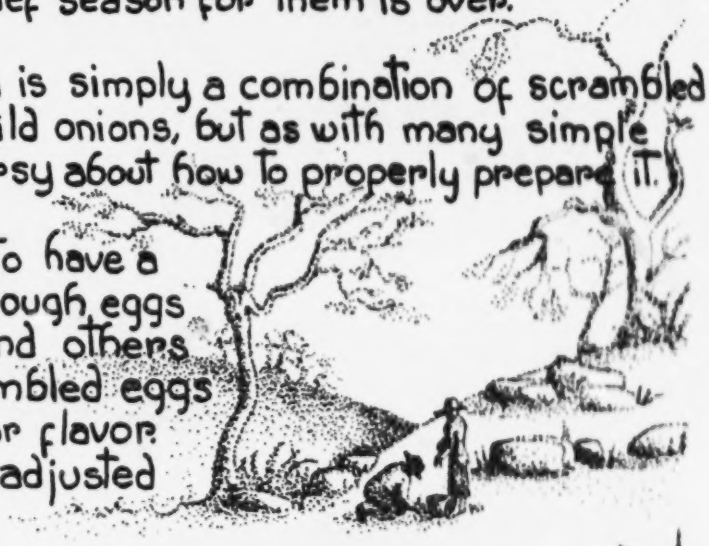
Wild Onions and Eggs

Gathering wild onions in the early spring is a yearly event among the Oklahoma Cherokees, as well as other Indians who live where these little plants grow. Many non-Indians of the area have learned to relish this tasty dish, as they have so many Indian foods. Today wild onions and eggs are often frozen and kept for months so they can be enjoyed even after the brief season for them is over.

Basically this dish is simply a combination of scrambled eggs and chopped young wild onions, but as with many simple recipes there is controversy about how to properly prepare it.



Some people like to have a lot of onions and just enough eggs to hold them together, and others like to have their scrambled eggs with just a few onions for flavor. The recipe has to be adjusted to suit your taste.

Start with a cup of wild onions which have been chopped into small pieces. Put two or three tablespoons of bacon drippings or oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the chopped onions and about one fourth cup of water and a pinch or two of salt. Simmer and stir until the onions are tender. A bit more water can be added if it evaporates too fast.

When the onions are tender and most of the water has cooked out add six slightly beaten eggs and scramble. Serve hot with fry-bread.

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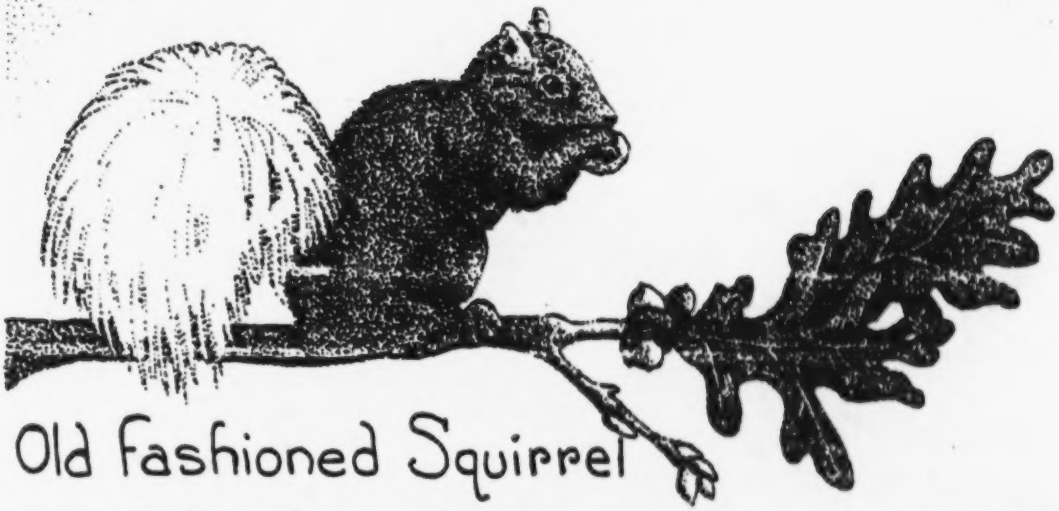

Old Fashioned Squirrel

Cut a dressed squirrel into serving pieces, sprinkle with salt and black pepper and dredge with flour.

Fry the squirrel in a heavy iron skillet over medium-high heat, turning often. Whether you are using oil or lard to fry with, keep about one half inch in the bottom of the pan while the squirrel fries.

When the pieces are golden brown remove them from the pan, then carefully pour the oil or lard into a container. It is best to let the pan cool just a bit before doing this.

Return the squirrel to the skillet with about one inch of water added. Cover with a heavy lid. Reduce the heat and simmer for about an hour.

Another method is to put the fried pieces into a baking dish with a bit of water and bake them in a 350° oven for about an hour. If baked uncovered the pieces should be turned several times.

Rabbit or chicken can also be prepared this way.

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OTHER SOURCES

A major source for the recipes and methods in this book are from a collection made by Jaunita Houston as a partial fulfillment of the requirements of a course in Cherokee Heritage at Northeastern State University at Tahlequah, Oklahoma; Martin Cochran, Instructor. This collection was accumulated by direct interviews with Traditional cooks and Tribal elders. The project was completed while Ms. Houston was a Teacher Trainee with the Cherokee Bilingual Education Center; Agnes Cowen Executive Director.

Contributions were also made by Margaret Nakedhead Kirk, Harleen Green, Nancy Lambert, Sandra Parker, Loretta Shade, Price and Famie Cochran, Wendell Cochran, Martin Cochran and Agnes Cowen.

GLOSSARY

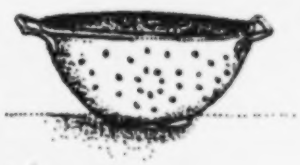
Many of the words listed here have more than one meaning; the definition given is the one that defines the word as it is used in this text.

AGRICULTURE: the science or art of cultivating the soil. Farming.

CENTURY: one hundred years.

CHINK: used to indicate either the filling of cracks between the logs of a log structure or the crack that is to be filled.

COLANDER: a perforated utensil for washing and draining food.



COMPLEMENTARY: serving to fill out or complete; mutually supplying each other's lack.

CONSISTENCY: firmness of material substance; condition of adhering together.

CRUSTACEAN: the family to which crawdads (crayfish) and lobsters belong.

CULTURE: here used to indicate the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thought, speech, action, and artifacts and depends upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.

DIAMETER: the length of a straight line through the center of an object.

EMETIC: an agent that induces vomiting.

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EVAPORATE: To dissipate or draw off in vapor or fumes. In cooking, liquid evaporates in steam.

FASTING: abstaining from food; eating sparingly or abstaining from some foods.

FIREDRILL: a device for starting a fire.

HERITAGE: something transmitted or acquired from a predecessor; something possessed as a result of one's natural situation or birth.

IMMIGRANT: a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence.

INNOVATOR: one who introduces something new or different or makes changes.

LIFESTYLE: an individual's typical way of life.

MORTAR: a strong vessel in which material is pounded or rubbed with a pestle. There are many kinds of mortars and pestles, including the kind used for pounding kanuchi.

Ancient Mortar and Pestle

NOMADIC: having no fixed residence, but wandering from place to place, usually seasonally and within a well defined territory in order to secure a food supply.

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NUTRITIOUS: nourishing.

PAMPAS: grass-covered plain of Temperate South America.

PLIABLE: supple enough to bend freely or repeatedly without breaking.

PRIMITIVE: of or relating to the earliest age or period; closely approximating an early ancestral type; belonging to or characteristic of an early stage of development.

STAPLES: used, needed, or enjoyed constantly by many individuals; produced regularly or in large quantities.

SUBSIST: To have existence; To receive maintenance.

TRADITION: the handing down of information, beliefs and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction; cultural continuity in social attitudes and institutions.

URBAN: of, relating to, characteristic of, or constituting a city.

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